



State and Empire in Eurasia/North Africa

600 B.C.E.–600 C.E.

Empires and Civilizations in Collision: The Persians and the Greeks

The Persian Empire
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Working with Evidence: Perceptions of Outsiders in the Ancient World

Are We Rome? It was the title of a thoughtful book, published in 2007, asking what had become a familiar question in the early twenty-first century: “Is the United States the new Roman Empire?”¹ With the collapse of the Soviet Union by 1991 and the subsequent U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, some commentators began to make the comparison. The United States’ enormous multicultural society, its technological achievements, its economically draining and over-stretched armed forces, its sense of itself as unique and endowed with a global mission, its concern about foreigners penetrating its borders, its apparent determination to maintain military superiority—all of this invited comparison with the Roman Empire. Supporters of a dominant role for the United States argued that Americans must face up to their responsibilities as “the undisputed master of the world” as the Romans did in their time. Critics warned that the Roman Empire became overextended abroad and corrupt and dictatorial at home and then collapsed, suggesting that a similar fate may await the U.S. empire. Either way, the point of reference was an empire that had passed into history some 1,500 years earlier, a continuing reminder of the significance of the distant past to our contemporary world. In fact, for at least several centuries, that empire has been a source of metaphors and “lessons” about personal morality, corruption, political life, military expansion, and much more.

Even in a world largely critical of empires, they still excite the imagination of historians and readers of history alike. The earliest ones show up in the era of the First Civilizations when Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian empires encompassed the city-states of Mesopotamia and established an enduring imperial tradition in the Middle East.

Terra-Cotta Archer Part of the immense funerary complex constructed for the Chinese ruler Qin Shihuangdi, this kneeling archer represents the military power that reunified a divided China under the Qin dynasty in 221 B.C.E.

Egypt became an imperial state when it temporarily ruled Nubia and the lands of the eastern Mediterranean. Following in their wake were many more empires, whose rise and fall have been central features of world history for the past 4,000 years.

But what exactly is an **empire**? At one level, empires are simply states, political systems that exercise **coercive** power. The term, however, is normally reserved for larger and more aggressive states, those that conquer, rule, and extract resources from other states and peoples. Thus empires have generally encompassed a considerable variety of peoples and cultures within a single political system, and they have often been associated with political or cultural oppression. Frequently, empires have given political expression to a civilization or culture, as in the Chinese and Persian empires. But civilizations have also flourished without a single all-encompassing state or empire, as in the competing city-states of Mesopotamia, Greece, and Mesoamerica or the many rival states of post-Roman Europe. In such cases, civilizations were expressed in elements of a common culture rather than in a unified political system.

AP® EXAM TIP

You must know the definition of “empire” as well as the names, places, and contributions of these empires.

The Eurasian empires of the second-wave era—those of Persia, Greece under Alexander the Great, Rome, China during the Qin (chihñ) and Han dynasties, and India during the Mauryan (MORE-yuhn) and Gupta dynasties—shared a set of common problems. Would they seek to impose the culture of the imperial heartland on their varied subjects? Would they rule conquered people directly or through established local authorities? How could they extract the wealth of empire in the form of taxes, tribute, and labor while maintaining order in conquered territories? And, no matter how impressive they were at their peak, they all sooner or later collapsed, providing a useful reminder to their descendants of the fleeting nature of all human projects.

Why have these and other empires been of such lasting fascination to both ancient and modern people? Perhaps in part because they were so big, creating a looming presence in their respective regions. Their armies and their tax collectors were hard to avoid. Maybe also because they were so bloody. The violence of conquest easily grabs our attention, and certainly all of these empires were founded and sustained at a great cost in human life. The collapse of these once-powerful states is likewise intriguing, for the fall of the mighty seems somehow satisfying, perhaps even a delayed form of justice. The study of empires also sets off by contrast those times and places in which civilizations have prospered without an enduring imperial state.

But empires have also commanded attention simply because they were important. While the political values of recent times have almost universally condemned empire building, very large numbers of people—probably the majority of humankind before the twentieth century—have lived out their lives in empires, where they were often governed by rulers culturally different from themselves. These imperial states brought together people of quite different traditions and religions and so stimulated the exchange of ideas, cultures, and values. Despite their violence, exploitation, and oppression, empires also imposed substantial periods of

A MAP OF TIME

750–336 B.C.E.	Era of Greek city-states
553–330 B.C.E.	Persian Achaemenid Empire
509 B.C.E.	Founding of the Roman Republic
500–221 B.C.E.	Chinese age of warring states
490 and 480 B.C.E.	Major battles between Persians and Greeks
479–429 B.C.E.	Golden Age of Athens
431–404 B.C.E.	Peloponnesian War
336–323 B.C.E.	Reign of Alexander the Great
326–184 B.C.E.	India's Mauryan dynasty empire
221–206 B.C.E.	China's Qin dynasty empire
206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.	China's Han dynasty empire
200 B.C.E.–200 C.E.	High point of Roman Empire
1st century B.C.E.	Transition from republic to empire in Rome
184 C.E.	Yellow Turban Rebellion in China
220 C.E.	Collapse of Chinese Han dynasty
320–550 C.E.	India's Gupta dynasty empire
5th century C.E.	Collapse of western Roman Empire

AP® EXAM TIP

You need to know when the empires featured in this chapter rose and fell.

peace and security, which fostered economic and artistic development, commercial exchange, and cultural mixing. In many places, empire also played an important role in defining masculinity, as conquest generated a warrior culture that gave particular prominence to the men who created and ruled those imperial states.

SEEKING THE MAIN POINT

How might you assess—both positively and negatively—the role of empires in the history of the second-wave era?

Empires and Civilizations in Collision: The Persians and the Greeks

The millennium between 600 B.C.E. and 600 C.E. in North Africa and Eurasia witnessed the flowering of second-wave civilizations in the Mediterranean world, the Middle East, India, and China. For the most part, these distant civilizations did not directly encounter one another, as each established its own political system, cultural values, and ways of organizing society. A great exception to that rule lay in the Mediterranean world and in the Middle East, where the emerging Persian Empire

and Greek civilization, physically adjacent to each other, experienced a centuries-long interaction and clash. It was one of the most consequential cultural encounters of the ancient world. (For another example of contact among second-wave empires, see the Zooming In feature on the Kushan Empire, page 128.)

The Persian Empire

In 500 B.C.E., the largest and most impressive of the world's empires was that of the Persians, an Indo-European people whose homeland lay on the Iranian plateau just north of the Persian Gulf. Living on the margins of the earlier Mesopotamian civilization, the Persians under the Achaemenid (ah-KEE-muh-nid) dynasty (553–330 B.C.E.) constructed an imperial system that drew on previous examples, such as the Babylonian and Assyrian empires, but far surpassed them all in size and splendor. Under the leadership of the famous monarchs Cyrus (r. 557–530 B.C.E.) and Darius (r. 522–486 B.C.E.), Persian conquests quickly reached from Egypt to India, encompassing in a single state some 35 to 50 million people, an immensely diverse realm containing dozens of peoples, states, languages, and cultural traditions (see Map 3.1).

The Persian Empire centered on an elaborate cult of kingship in which the monarch, secluded in royal magnificence, could be approached only through an elaborate ritual. When the king died, sacred fires all across the land were extinguished, Persians were expected to shave their hair in mourning, and the manes of horses were cut short. Ruling by the will of the great Persian god Ahura Mazda (uh-HOORE-uh MAHZ-duh), kings were absolute monarchs, more than willing to crush rebellious regions or officials. Interrupted on one occasion while he was with his wife, Darius ordered the offender, a high-ranking nobleman, killed, along with his entire clan. In the eyes of many, Persian monarchs fully deserved their effusive title—“Great king, King of kings, King of countries containing all kinds of men, King in this great earth far and wide.” Darius himself best expressed the authority of the Persian ruler when he observed, “What was said to them by me, night and day, it was done.”²

But more than conquest and royal decree sustained the empire. An effective administrative system placed Persian governors, called *satraps* (SAY-traps), in each of the empire's twenty-three provinces, while lower-level officials were drawn from local authorities. A system of imperial spies, known as the “eyes and ears of the King,” represented a further imperial presence in the far reaches of the empire. A general policy of respect for the empire's many non-Persian cultural traditions also cemented the state's authority. Cyrus won the gratitude of the Jews when in 539 B.C.E. he allowed those exiled in Babylon to return to their homeland and rebuild their temple in Jerusalem (see Chapter 4, pages 166–67). In Egypt and Babylon, Persian kings took care to uphold local religious cults in an effort to gain the support of their followers and officials. The Greek historian Herodotus commented that “there is no nation which so readily adopts foreign customs. They have taken the dress of the Medes and in war they wear the Egyptian breastplate.

AP® EXAM TIP

You will be expected to know at least one of the three Persian empires. The Achaemenid is the most famous.

Guided Reading Question

■ COMPARISON

How did Persian and Greek civilizations differ in their political organization and values?

AP® EXAM TIP

Note these examples of how empires were governed, or their “imperial administration.” Examples continue on page 109.



Map 3.1 The Persian Empire

At its height, the Persian Empire was the largest in the world. It dominated the lands of the First Civilizations in the Middle East and was commercially connected to neighboring regions.

As soon as they hear of any luxury, they instantly make it their own.”³ (See more on Herodotus’s perceptions of Persia in Working with Evidence, Source 3.1, page 137.) For the next 1,000 years or more, Persian imperial bureaucracy and court life, replete with administrators, tax collectors, record keepers, and translators, provided a model for all subsequent regimes in the region, including, later, those of the Islamic world.

The infrastructure of empire included a system of standardized coinage, predictable taxes levied on each province, and a newly dug canal linking the Nile with the Red Sea, which greatly expanded commerce and enriched Egypt. A “royal road,” some 1,700 miles in length, facilitated communication and commerce across this vast empire. Caravans of merchants could traverse this highway in three months, but agents of the imperial courier service, using a fresh supply of horses every twenty-five to thirty miles, could carry a message from one end of the road to another in a week or two. Herodotus was impressed. “Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor darkness of night,” he wrote, “prevents them from accomplishing the task proposed to them with utmost speed.” And an elaborate underground irrigation



Persepolis

The largest palace in Persepolis, the Persian Empire's ancient capital, was the Audience Hall. The emperor officially greeted visiting dignitaries at this palace, which was constructed around 500 B.C.E. This relief, which shows a lion attacking a bull and Persian guards at attention, adorns a staircase leading to the Audience Hall. (Giraudon/Bridgeman Images)

system sustained a rich agricultural economy in the semi-arid conditions of the Iranian plateau and spread from there throughout the Middle East and beyond.

Elaborate imperial centers, particularly Susa and Persepolis, reflected the immense wealth and power of the Persian Empire. Palaces, audience halls, quarters for the harem, monuments, and carvings made these cities into powerful symbols of imperial authority. Materials and workers alike were drawn from all corners of the empire and beyond. Inscribed in the foundation of Persepolis was Darius's commentary on what he had set in motion: "And Ahura Mazda was of such a mind, together with all the other gods, that this fortress [should] be built. And [so] I built it. And I built it secure and beautiful and adequate, just as I was intending to."⁴

The Greeks

AP[®] EXAM TIP

You should know the features and roles of cities throughout the course.

It would be hard to imagine a sharper contrast than that between the huge and centralized Persian Empire, governed by an absolute and almost unapproachable monarch, and the small competing city-states of classical Greece, which allowed varying degrees of popular participation in political life. Like the Persians, the Greeks were an Indo-European people whose early history drew on the legacy of the First Civilizations. The classical Greece of historical fame emerged around 750 B.C.E. as a new civilization and flourished for about 400 years before it was incorporated into a succession of foreign empires. During that relatively short period, the civilization of Athens and Sparta, of Plato and Aristotle, of Zeus and Apollo took shape and collided with its giant neighbor to the east.

Calling themselves Hellenes, the Greeks created a civilization that was distinctive in many ways, particularly in comparison with that of the Persians. The total population of Greece and the Aegean basin was just 2 million to 3 million, a fraction of that of the Persian Empire. Furthermore, Greek civilization took shape on a small peninsula, deeply divided by steep mountains and valleys. Its geography certainly contributed to the political shape of that civilization, which found expression not in a Persian-style empire, but in hundreds of city-states or small settlements (see Map 3.2). Most were quite modest in size, with between 500 and 5,000 male



Map 3.2 Classical Greece

The classical civilization of Greece was centered on a small peninsula of southeastern Europe, but Greek settlers planted elements of that civilization along the coasts of the Mediterranean and Black seas.

citizens. But Greek civilization, like its counterparts elsewhere, also left a decisive environmental mark on the lands it encompassed. Smelting metals such as silver, lead, copper, bronze, and iron required enormous supplies of wood, leading to deforestation and soil erosion. Plato declared that the area around Athens had become “a mere relic of the original country. . . . All the rich soil has melted away, leaving a country of skin and bone.”⁵

Each of these city-states was fiercely independent and in frequent conflict with its neighbors, yet they had much in common, speaking the same language and worshipping the same gods. Every four years they temporarily suspended their continual conflicts to participate together in the Olympic Games, which had begun

Guided Reading Question

■ CHANGE

How did semidemocratic governments emerge in some of the Greek city-states?

in 776 B.C.E. But this emerging sense of Greek cultural identity did little to overcome the endemic political rivalries of the larger city-states, including Athens, Sparta, Thebes, and Corinth, among many others.

AP[®] EXAM TIP

Use the discussion on these pages of similarities and differences between the Persians and Greeks to develop your skills in writing comparative essays.

Like the Persians, the Greeks were an expansive people, but their expansion took the form of settlement in distant places rather than conquest and empire. Pushed by a growing population, Greek traders in search of iron and impoverished Greek farmers in search of land stimulated a remarkable emigration. Between 750 and 500 B.C.E., the Greeks established settlements all around the Mediterranean basin and the rim of the Black Sea. Settlers brought Greek culture, language, and building styles to these new lands, even as they fought, traded, and intermarried with their non-Greek neighbors.

The most distinctive feature of Greek civilization, and the greatest contrast with Persia, lay in the extent of popular participation in political life that occurred within at least some of the city-states. It was the idea of “citizenship,” of free people managing the affairs of state, of equality for all citizens before the law, that was so unique. A foreign king, observing the operation of the public assembly in Athens, was amazed that male citizens as a whole actually voted on matters of policy: “I find it astonishing,” he noted, “that here wise men speak on public affairs, while fools decide them.”⁶ Compared to the rigid hierarchies, inequalities, and absolute monarchies of Persia and other ancient civilizations, the Athenian experiment was remarkable. This is how one modern scholar defined it:

Among the Greeks the question of who should reign arose in a new way. Previously the most that had been asked was whether one man or another should govern and whether one alone or several together. But now the question was whether all the citizens, including the poor, might govern and whether it would be possible for them to govern as citizens, without specializing in politics. In other words, should the governed themselves actively participate in politics on a regular basis?⁷

The extent of participation and the role of “citizens” varied considerably, both over time and from city to city. Early in Greek history, only wealthy and well-born men had the rights of full citizenship, such as speaking and voting in the assembly, holding public office, and fighting in the army. Gradually, men of the lower classes, mostly small-scale farmers, also obtained these rights. At least in part, this broadening of political rights was associated with the growing number of men able to afford the armor and weapons that would allow them to serve as hoplites, or infantrymen, in the armies of the city-states. In many places, strong but benevolent rulers known as tyrants emerged for a time, usually with the support of the poorer classes, to challenge the prerogatives of the wealthy. Sparta—famous for its extreme forms of military discipline and its large population of helots, conquered people who lived in slave-like conditions—vested most political authority in its Council of Elders. The council was composed of twenty-eight men over the age of sixty, derived from the wealthier and more influential segment of society, who served for life and provided political leadership for Sparta.

It was in Athens that the Greek experiment in political participation achieved its most distinctive expression. Early steps in this direction were the product of intense class conflict, leading almost to civil war. A reforming leader named Solon emerged in 594 B.C.E. to push Athenian politics in a more democratic direction, breaking the hold of a small group of aristocratic families. Debt slavery was abolished, access to public office was opened to a wider group of men, and all citizens were allowed to take part in the Assembly. Later reformers such as Cleisthenes (KLEYE-sthuh-nees) and Pericles extended the rights of citizens even further. By 450 B.C.E., all holders of public office were chosen by lot and were paid, so that even the poorest could serve. The Assembly, where all citizens could participate, became the center of political life.

Athenian democracy, however, was different from modern democracy. It was direct, rather than representative, democracy, and it was distinctly limited. Women, slaves, and foreigners, together far more than half of the population, were wholly excluded from political participation. Nonetheless, political life in Athens was a world away from that of the Persian Empire and even from that of many other Greek cities.

Collision: The Greco-Persian Wars

In recent centuries, many writers and scholars have claimed classical Greece as the foundation of Western or European civilization. But the ancient Greeks themselves looked primarily to the East—to Egypt and the Persian Empire. In Egypt, Greek scholars found impressive mathematical and astronomical traditions on which they built. And Persia represented both an immense threat and later, under Alexander the Great, an opportunity for Greek empire building.

If ever there was an unequal conflict between civilizations, surely it was the collision of the Greeks and the Persians. The confrontation between the small and divided Greek cities and Persia, the world's largest empire, grew out of their respective patterns of expansion. A number of Greek settlements on the Anatolian seacoast, known to the Greeks as Ionia, came under Persian control as that empire extended its domination to the west. In 499 B.C.E., some of these Ionian Greek cities revolted against Persian domination and found support from Athens on the Greek mainland. Outraged by this assault from the remote and upstart Greeks, the Persians, twice in ten years (490 and 480 B.C.E.), launched major military expeditions to punish the Greeks in general and Athens in particular. Against all odds and all expectations, the Greeks held them off, defeating the Persians on both land and sea.

Though no doubt embarrassing, their defeat on the far western fringes of the empire had little effect on the Persians. However, it had a profound impact on the Greeks and especially on Athens, whose forces had led the way to victory. Beating the Persians in battle was a source of enormous pride for Greece. Years later, elderly Athenian men asked one another how old they had been when the Greeks triumphed in the momentous Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.E. In their view, this

Guided Reading Question

■ CONNECTION

What were the consequences for both sides of the encounter between the Persians and the Greeks?

victory was the product of Greek freedoms because those freedoms had motivated men to fight with extraordinary courage for what they valued so highly. It led to a Western worldview in which Persia represented Asia and despotism, whereas Greece signified Europe and freedom. Thus was born the notion of an East/West divide, which has shaped European and North American thinking about the world into the twenty-first century.

The Greek victory also radicalized Athenian democracy, for it had been men of the poorer classes who had rowed their ships to victory and who were now in a position to insist on full citizenship. The fifty years or so after the Greco-Persian Wars were not only the high point of Athenian democracy but also the Golden Age of Greek culture. During this period, the Parthenon, that marvelous temple to the Greek goddess Athena, was built; Greek theater was born from the work of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides; and Socrates was beginning his career as a philosopher and an irritant in Athens.

But Athens's Golden Age was also an era of incipient empire. In the Greco-Persian Wars, Athens had led a coalition of more than thirty Greek city-states on the basis of its naval power, but Athenian leadership in the struggle against Persian aggression had spawned an imperialism of its own. After the war, Athenian efforts to solidify Athens's dominant position among the allies led to intense resentment and finally to a bitter civil war (431–404 B.C.E.), with Sparta taking the lead in defending the traditional independence of Greek city-states. In this bloody conflict, known as the Peloponnesian War, Athens was defeated, while the Greeks exhausted themselves and magnified their distrust of one another. Thus the way was open to their eventual takeover by the growing forces of Macedonia, a frontier kingdom on the northern fringes of the Greek world. The glory days of the Greek experiment were over, but the spread of Greek culture was just beginning.

Collision: Alexander and the Hellenistic Era

The Macedonian takeover of Greece, led by its king, Philip II, finally accomplished by 338 B.C.E. what the Greeks themselves had been unable to achieve—the political unification of Greece, but at the cost of much of the prized independence of its various city-states. It also set in motion a second round in the collision of Greece and Persia as Philip's son, Alexander, prepared to lead a massive Greek expedition against the Persian Empire. Such a project appealed to those who sought vengeance for the earlier Persian assault on Greece, but it also served to unify the fractious Greeks in a war against their common enemy.

The story of this ten-year expedition (333–323 B.C.E.), accomplished while Alexander was still in his twenties, has become the stuff of legend (see Map 3.3). Surely it was among the greatest military feats of the ancient world in that it created a Greek empire from Egypt and Anatolia in the west to Afghanistan and India in the east. In the process, the great Persian Empire was thoroughly defeated; its capital, Persepolis (per-SEP-uh-lis), was looted and burned; and Alexander was hailed as

AP® EXAM TIP

You should have a clear understanding of the size, place, and time of Alexander's empire.

Guided Reading Question

CONNECTION

What changes did Alexander's conquests bring in their wake?



Map 3.3 Alexander's Empire and Successor States

Alexander's conquests, though enormous, did not long remain within a single empire, for his generals divided them into three successor states shortly after his death. This was the Hellenistic world within which Greek culture spread.

the “king of Asia.” In Egypt, Alexander, then just twenty-four years old, was celebrated as a liberator from Persian domination, was anointed as pharaoh, and was declared by Egyptian priests to be the “son of the gods.” Arrian, a later Greek historian, described Alexander in this way:

His passion was for glory only, and in that he was insatiable. . . . Noble indeed was his power of inspiring his men, of filling them with confidence, and in the moment of danger, of sweeping away their fear by the spectacle of his own fearlessness.⁸

Alexander died in 323 B.C.E., without returning to Greece, and his empire was soon divided into three kingdoms, ruled by leading Macedonian generals.

From the viewpoint of world history, the chief significance of Alexander's amazing conquests lay in the widespread dissemination of Greek culture during what historians call the Hellenistic era (323–30 B.C.E.). Elements of that culture, generated

AP® EXAM TIP

Take good notes on the cultural effects of Hellenism, discussed here and in Chapter 4.



Alexander the Great

This mosaic of Alexander on horseback comes from the Roman city of Pompeii. It depicts the Battle of Issus (333 B.C.E.), in which Greek forces, although considerably outnumbered, defeated the Persian army, led personally by Emperor Darius III. (Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, Italy/De Agostini Picture Library/G. Nimatallah/Bridgeman Images)

in a small and remote Mediterranean peninsula, now penetrated the lands of the First Civilizations—Egypt, Mesopotamia, and India—resulting in one of the great cultural encounters of the ancient world.

The major avenue for the spread of Greek culture lay in the many cities that Alexander and later Hellenistic rulers established throughout the empire. Complete with Greek monuments, sculptures, theaters, markets, councils, and assemblies, these cities attracted many thousands of Greek settlers serving as state officials, soldiers, or traders. Alexandria in Egypt—the largest of these cities, with half a million people—was an enormous cosmopolitan center where Egyptians, Greeks, Jews, Babylonians, Syrians, Persians, and many others

rubbed elbows. A harbor with space for 1,200 ships facilitated long-distance commerce. Greek learning flourished thanks to a library of some 700,000 volumes and the Museum, which sponsored scholars and writers of all kinds.

From cities such as these, Greek culture spread. From the Mediterranean to India, Greek became the language of power and elite culture. The Indian monarch Ashoka published some of his decrees in Greek, while an independent Greek state was established in Bactria in what is now northern Afghanistan. The attraction of many young Jews to Greek culture prompted the Pharisees to develop their own school system, as this highly conservative Jewish sect feared for the very survival of Judaism. (See *Zooming In: The Kushan Empire*, page 128, for Greek influence on this Central Asian kingdom.)

Cities such as Alexandria were very different from the original city-states of Greece, both in their cultural diversity and in the absence of the independence so valued by Athens and Sparta. Now they were part of large conquest states ruled by Greeks: the Ptolemaic (TOL-uh-MAY-ik) empire in Egypt and the Seleucid empire in Persia. These were imperial states, which, in their determination to preserve order, raise taxes, and maintain the authority of the monarch, resembled the much older empires of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Assyria, and Persia. Macedonians and Greeks, representing perhaps 10 percent of the population in these Hellenistic kingdoms, were clearly the elite and sought to keep themselves separate from non-Greeks. In Egypt, different legal systems for Greeks and native Egyptians maintained this separation. An Egyptian agricultural worker complained that because he was an Egyptian, his supervisors despised him and refused to pay him.⁹ Periodic

rebellions expressed resentment at Greek arrogance, condescension, and exploitation. But the separation between the Greeks and native populations was by no means complete, and a fair amount of cultural interaction and blending occurred. Alexander himself had taken several Persian princesses as his wives and actively encouraged intermarriage between his troops and Asian women. In both Egypt and Mesopotamia, Greek rulers patronized the building of temples to local gods and actively supported their priests. A growing number of native peoples were able to become Greek citizens by obtaining a Greek education, speaking the language, dressing appropriately, and assuming Greek names. In India, Greeks were assimilated into the hierarchy of the caste system as members of the Kshatriya (warrior) caste, while in Bactria a substantial number of Greeks converted to Buddhism, including one of their kings, Menander. A school of Buddhist art that emerged in the early centuries of the Common Era depicted the Buddha in human form for the first time, but in Greek-like garb with a face resembling the god Apollo. (See Working with Evidence, Source 4.2, page 186.) Clearly, not all was conflict between the Greeks and the peoples of the East.

In the long run, much of this Greek cultural influence faded as the Hellenistic kingdoms that had promoted it weakened and vanished by the first century B.C.E. While it lasted, however, it represented a remarkable cultural encounter, born of the collision of two empires and two second-wave civilizations. In the western part of that Hellenistic world, Greek rule was replaced by that of the Romans, whose empire, like Alexander's, also served as a vehicle for the continued spread of Greek culture and ideas.

Comparing Empires: Roman and Chinese

While the adjacent civilizations of the Greeks and the Persians collided, two other empires were taking shape—the Roman Empire on the far western side of Eurasia and China's imperial state on the far eastern end. They flourished at roughly the same time (200 B.C.E.–200 C.E.); they occupied a similar area (about 1.5 million square miles); and they encompassed populations of a similar size (50 to 60 million). They were the giant empires of their time, shaping the lives of close to half of the world's population. Unlike the Greeks and the Persians, the Romans and the Chinese were only dimly aware of each other and had almost no direct contact. Historians, however, have seen them as fascinating variations on an imperial theme and have long explored their similarities and differences.

Rome: From City-State to Empire

The rise of empires is among the perennial questions that historians tackle. Like the Persian Empire, that of the Romans took shape initially on the margins of the civilized world and was an unlikely rags-to-riches story. Rome began as a small and impoverished city-state on the western side of central Italy in the eighth century

AP® EXAM TIP

The AP® exam has included questions about political, social, and/or economic connections between the Roman and Chinese empires in this era.

AP® EXAM TIP

Know the reasons for the rise of empires in the classical era.

AP® EXAM TIP

You should know differences in the features and dates of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire.

B.C.E. According to legend, the city was so weak that Romans were reduced to kidnapping neighboring women to maintain its population. In a transformation of epic proportions, Rome subsequently became the center of an enormous imperial state that encompassed the Mediterranean basin and included parts of continental Europe, Britain, North Africa, and the Middle East.

Originally ruled by a king, around 509 B.C.E. Roman aristocrats threw off the monarchy and established a republic in which the men of a wealthy class, known as patricians, dominated. Executive authority was exercised by two consuls, who were advised by a patrician assembly, the Senate. Deepening conflict with the poorer classes, called plebeians (plih-BEE-uhns), led to important changes in Roman political life. A written code of law offered plebeians some protection from abuse; a system of public assemblies provided an opportunity for lower classes to shape public policy; and a new office of tribune, who represented plebeians, allowed them to block unfavorable legislation. Romans took great pride in this political system, believing that they enjoyed greater freedom than did many of their more autocratic neighbors. The values of the republic—rule of law, the rights of citizens, the absence of pretension, upright moral behavior, keeping one’s word—were later idealized as “the way of the ancestors.”

With this political system and these values, the Romans launched their empire-building enterprise, a prolonged process that took more than 500 years (see Map 3.4). It began in the 490s B.C.E. with Roman control over its Latin neighbors in central Italy and over the next several hundred years encompassed most of the Italian peninsula. Between 264 and 146 B.C.E., victory in the Punic Wars with Carthage, a powerful empire with its capital in North Africa, extended Roman control over the western Mediterranean, including Spain, and made Rome a naval power. Subsequent expansion in the eastern Mediterranean brought the ancient civilizations of Greece, Egypt, and Mesopotamia under Roman domination. Rome also expanded into territories in Southern and Western Europe, including present-day France and Britain. By early in the second century C.E., the Roman Empire had reached its maximum extent. Like classical Greece, that empire has been associated with Europe. But in its own time, elites in North Africa and Southwest Asia likewise claimed Roman identity, and the empire’s richest provinces were in the east.

No overall design or blueprint drove the building of empire, nor were there any precedents to guide the Romans. What they created was something wholly new—an empire that encompassed the entire Mediterranean basin and beyond. It was a piecemeal process, which the Romans invariably saw as defensive. Each addition of territory created new vulnerabilities, which could be assuaged only by more conquests. For some, the growth of empire represented opportunity. Poor soldiers hoped for land, loot, or salaries that might lift their families out of poverty. The well-to-do or well-connected gained great estates, earned promotions, and sometimes achieved public acclaim and high political office. The wealth of long-established societies in the eastern Mediterranean (Greece and Egypt, for example) beckoned, as did the resources and food supplies of the less developed regions, such

Guided Reading Question**CHANGE**

How did Rome grow from a single city to the center of a huge empire?



Map 3.4 The Roman Empire

At its height in the second century C.E., the Roman Empire incorporated the entire Mediterranean basin, including the lands of the Carthaginian Empire, the less developed region of Western Europe, the heartland of Greek civilization, and the ancient civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia.

as Western Europe. There was no shortage of motivation for the creation of the Roman Empire.

Although Rome's central location in the Mediterranean basin provided a convenient launching pad for empire, it was the army, "well-trained, well-fed, and well-rewarded," that built the empire.¹⁰ Drawing on the growing population of Italy, that army was often brutal in war. Carthage, for example, was utterly destroyed; the city was razed to the ground, and its inhabitants were either killed or sold into slavery. Nonetheless, Roman authorities could be generous to former enemies. Some were granted Roman citizenship; others were treated as allies and allowed to maintain their local rulers. As the empire grew, so too did political

AP® EXAM TIP

Knowledge of maps of empires throughout world history is critical. In fact, a clear understanding of every map in this text is essential. Be sure you know how to read the maps and understand the information they convey.



Queen Boudica

This statue in London commemorates the resistance of the Celtic people of eastern Britain against Roman rule during a revolt in 60–61 C.E., led by Queen Boudica. A later Roman historian lamented that “all this ruin was brought upon the Romans by a woman, a fact which in itself caused them the greatest shame.” (Daniel Boulet, photographer)

AP® EXAM TIP

Gender roles—the expectations for how men and women should act and interact in societies—are an important concept in this course.

forces in Rome that favored its continued expansion and were willing to commit the necessary manpower and resources.

Centuries of empire building and the warfare that made it possible had an impact on Roman society and values. That vast process, for example, shaped Roman understandings of gender and the appropriate roles of men and women. Rome was becoming a warrior society in which the masculinity of upper-class male citizens was defined in part by a man’s role as a soldier and a property owner. In private life, this translated into absolute control over his wife, children, and slaves, including the theoretical right to kill them without

interference from the state. This ability of a free man and a Roman citizen to act decisively in both public and private life lay at the heart of ideal male identity. A Roman woman could participate proudly in this warrior culture by bearing brave sons and inculcating these values in her offspring.

Strangely enough, by the early centuries of the Common Era the wealth of empire, the authority of the imperial state, and the breakdown of older Roman social patterns combined to offer women in the elite classes a less restricted life than they had known in the early centuries of the republic. Upper-class Roman women had never been as secluded in the home as were their Greek counterparts, and now the legal authority of their husbands was curtailed by the intrusion of the state into what had been private life. The head of household, or *pater familias*, lost his earlier power of life and death over his family. Furthermore, such women could now marry without transferring legal control to their husbands and were increasingly able to manage their own finances and take part in the growing commercial economy of the empire. According to one scholar, Roman women of the wealthier classes gained “almost complete liberty in matters of property and marriage.”¹¹ At the other end of the social spectrum, Roman conquests brought many thousands of women as well as men into the empire as slaves, who were often brutally treated and subject to the whims of their masters (see Chapter 5, pages 203–8).

The relentless expansion of empire raised yet another profound question for Rome: could republican government and values survive the acquisition of a huge empire? The wealth of empire enriched a few, enabling them to acquire large estates and many slaves, while pushing growing numbers of free farmers into the cities and poverty. Imperial riches also empowered a small group of military leaders—

Marius, Sulla, Pompey, Julius Caesar—who recruited their troops directly from the ranks of the poor and whose fierce rivalries brought civil war to Rome during the first century B.C.E. Traditionalists lamented the apparent decline of republican values—simplicity, service, free farmers as the backbone of the army, the authority of the Senate—amid the self-seeking ambition of the newly rich and powerful. When the dust settled from the civil war, Rome was clearly changing, for authority was now vested primarily in an emperor, the first of whom was Octavian, later granted the title of Augustus (r. 27 B.C.E.–14 C.E.), which implied a divine status for the ruler. The republic was history; Rome had become an empire and its ruler an emperor.

But it was an empire with an uneasy conscience, for many felt that in acquiring an empire, Rome had betrayed and abandoned its republican origins. Augustus was careful to maintain the forms of the republic—the Senate, consuls, public assemblies—and referred to himself as “first man” rather than “king” or “emperor,” even as he accumulated enormous personal power. And in a bow to republican values, he spoke of the empire’s conquests as reflecting the “power of the Roman people” rather than of the Roman state. Despite this rhetoric, he was emperor in practice, if not in name, for he was able to exercise sole authority, backed up by his command of a professional army. Later emperors were less reluctant to flaunt their imperial prerogatives.

During the first two centuries C.E., this empire in disguise provided security, grandeur, and relative prosperity for the Mediterranean world. In 155 C.E., Aelius Aristides, one of the empire’s Greek subjects from the west coast of Anatolia and himself a Roman citizen, expressed this perspective as he praised the empire to the sky in front of the emperor Antonius:

Everywhere you have made citizens all those who are the more accomplished, noble and powerful people, even if they retain their native affinities. . . . No envy walks in your empire. . . . There has arisen a single harmonious government which has embraced all men. . . . And the whole inhabited world, as it were attending a national festival, has laid aside . . . the carrying of weapons. . . . Now it is possible for both Greek and barbarian to travel easily wherever he wishes.¹²

This was the *pax Romana*, the Roman peace, the era of imperial Rome’s greatest extent and greatest authority.

China: From Warring States to Empire

About the same time, on the other side of Eurasia, another huge imperial state was in the making—China. Here, however, the task was understood differently. It was not a matter of creating something new, as in the case of the Roman Empire, but of restoring something old. As one of the First Civilizations, a Chinese state

had emerged as early as 2200 B.C.E. and under the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties had grown progressively larger. By 500 B.C.E., however, this Chinese state was in shambles. Any earlier unity vanished in an “age of warring states,” featuring the endless rivalries of seven competing kingdoms.

To many Chinese, this was a wholly unnatural and unacceptable condition, and rulers in various states vied to reunify China. One of them, known to history as Qin Shihuangdi (chihn shee-HUANG-dee) (i.e., Shihuangdi from the state of Qin), succeeded brilliantly. The state of Qin had already developed an effective bureaucracy, subordinated its aristocracy, equipped its army with iron weapons, and enjoyed rapidly rising agricultural output and a growing population. It also had adopted a political philosophy called Legalism, which advocated clear rules and harsh punishments as a means of enforcing the authority of the state. With these resources, Shihuangdi (r. 221–210 B.C.E.) launched a military campaign to reunify China and in just ten years soundly defeated the other warring states. Believing that he had created a universal and eternal empire, he grandly named himself Shihuangdi, which means the “first emperor.” Unlike Augustus, he showed little ambivalence about empire. Subsequent conquests extended China’s boundaries far to the south into the northern part of Vietnam, to the northeast into Korea, and to the northwest, where the Chinese pushed back the nomadic pastoral people of the steppes. (See *Zooming In: Trung Trac*, page 124, for an example of resistance to Chinese expansion.) Although the boundaries fluctuated over time, Shihuangdi laid the foundations for a unified Chinese state, which has endured, with periodic interruptions, to the present (see Map 3.5).

Building on earlier precedents, the Chinese process of empire formation was far more compressed than the centuries-long Roman effort, but it was no less dependent on military force and no less brutal. Scholars who opposed Shihuangdi’s policies were executed and their books burned. Aristocrats who might oppose his centralizing policies were moved physically to the capital. Hundreds of thousands of laborers were recruited to construct the Great Wall of China, designed to keep out northern “barbarians,” and to erect a monumental mausoleum as the emperor’s final resting place. More positively, Shihuangdi imposed a uniform system of weights, measures, and currency and standardized the length of axles for carts and the written form of the Chinese language.

As in Rome, the creation of the Chinese empire had domestic repercussions, but they were brief and superficial compared to Rome’s transition from republic to empire. The speed and brutality of Shihuangdi’s policies ensured that his own Qin dynasty did not last long, and it collapsed unmourned in 206 B.C.E. The Han dynasty that followed (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) retained the centralized features of Shihuangdi’s creation, although it moderated the harshness of his policies, adopting a milder and moralistic Confucianism in place of Legalism as the governing philosophy of the state. It was Han dynasty rulers who consolidated China’s imperial state and established the political patterns that lasted into the twentieth century.

Guided Reading Question

COMPARISON

Why was the Chinese empire able to take shape so quickly, while that of the Romans took centuries?

AP® EXAM TIP

You should know political features of the Qin dynasty.



Map 3.5 Classical China

The brief Qin dynasty brought unity to the heartland of Chinese civilization, and the much longer Han dynasty extended its territorial reach south toward Vietnam, east to Korea, and west into Central Asia. To the north lay the military confederacy of the nomadic Xiongnu.

Consolidating the Roman and Chinese Empires

Once established, these two huge imperial systems shared a number of common features. Both, for example, defined themselves in universal terms. The Roman writer Polybius spoke of bringing “almost the entire world” under the control of Rome, while the Chinese state was said to encompass “all under heaven.” Both of them invested heavily in public works—roads, bridges, aqueducts, canals, protective walls—all designed to integrate their respective domains militarily and commercially.

Furthermore, Roman and Chinese authorities both invoked supernatural sanctions to support their rule. By the first century C.E., Romans began to regard their deceased emperors as gods and established a religious cult to bolster the authority of living rulers. It was the refusal of early Christians to take part in this cult that provoked their periodic persecution by Roman authorities.

AP® EXAM TIP

The ways emperors built and maintained power in the classical era is an important concept in AP® World History.

Guided Reading Question

EXPLANATION

Why were the Roman and Chinese empires able to enjoy long periods of relative stability and prosperity?

Trung Trac: Resisting the Chinese Empire

Empires have long faced resistance from people they conquer and never more fiercely than in Vietnam, which was incorporated into an expanding Chinese empire for over a thousand years (111 B.C.E.–939 C.E.). Among the earliest examples of Vietnamese resistance to this occupation was that led around 40 C.E. by Trung Trac and her younger sister Trung Nhi,

daughters in an aristocratic, military family. Trung Trac married a prominent local lord, Thi Sach, who was a vocal opponent of offensive Chinese policies—high taxes, even on the right to fish in local rivers; required payoffs to Chinese officials; and the imposition of Chinese culture on the Vietnamese. In response to this opposition, the Chinese governor of the region ordered Thi Sach’s execution.

This personal tragedy provoked Trung Trac to take up arms against the Chinese occupiers, and she quickly gained a substantial following among peasants and aristocrats alike. Famously addressing some 30,000 soldiers, while dressed in full military regalia rather than the expected mourning clothes, she declared to the assembled crowd:

Foremost I will avenge my country.
 Second I will restore the Hung lineage.
 Third I will avenge the death of my husband.
 Lastly I vow that these goals will be accomplished.

Within months, her forces had captured sixty-five towns, and, for two years, they held the Chinese at bay, while Trung Trac and Trung Nhi ruled a briefly independent state as co-queens. Chinese sources referred to Trung Trac as a “ferocious warrior.” During their rule,



Trung Trac and Trung Nhi.

the sisters eliminated the hated tribute taxes imposed by the Chinese and sought to restore the authority of Vietnamese aristocrats. A large military force, said to number some 80,000, counted among its leaders thirty-six female “generals,” including the Trung sisters’ mother.

Soon, however, Chinese forces overwhelmed the rebel-

lion, and Trung Trac’s support faded. Later Vietnamese records explained the failure of the revolt as a consequence of its female leadership. In traditional Vietnamese accounts, the Trung sisters committed suicide, jumping into a nearby river, as did a number of their followers.

Although the revolt failed, it lived on in stories and legends to inspire later Vietnamese resistance to invaders—Chinese, French, Japanese, and American alike. Men were reminded that women had led this rebellion. “What a pity,” wrote a thirteenth-century Vietnamese historian, “that for a thousand years after this, the men of our land bowed their heads, folded their arms, and served the northerners [Chinese].”¹³ To this day, temples, streets, and neighborhoods bear the name of the Trung sisters, and a yearly celebration in their honor coincides with International Women’s Day. Usually depicted riding on war elephants and wielding swords, these two women also represent the more fluid gender roles then available to some Vietnamese women in comparison to the stricter patriarchy prevalent in China.

Question: How might you imagine the reactions to the Trung sisters’ revolt from Chinese officials; Vietnamese aristocrats; Vietnamese peasants, both male and female; and later generations of Vietnamese men and women?

photo: CPA Media

In China, a much older tradition had long linked events on Earth with the invisible realm called “Heaven.” In this conception, Heaven was neither a place nor a supreme being, but rather an impersonal moral force that regulated the universe. Emperors were called the Son of Heaven and were said to govern by the Mandate of Heaven so long as they ruled morally and with benevolence. Peasant rebellions, “barbarian” invasions, or disastrous floods were viewed as signs that the emperor had ruled badly and had thus lost the Mandate of Heaven. Among the chief duties of the emperor was the performance of various rituals thought to maintain the appropriate relationship between Heaven and Earth. What moral government meant in practice was spelled out in the writings of Confucius and his followers, which became the official ideology of the empire (see Chapter 4).

Both of these second-wave civilizations also absorbed a foreign religious tradition—Christianity in the Roman world and Buddhism in China—although the process unfolded somewhat differently. In the case of Rome, Christianity was born as a small sect in a remote corner of the empire. Aided by the *pax Romana* and Roman roads, the new faith spread slowly for several centuries, particularly among the poor and lower classes. Women were prominent in the leadership of the early Church, as were a number of more well-to-do individuals from urban families. After suffering intermittent persecution, Christianity in the fourth century C.E. obtained state support from emperors who hoped to shore up a tottering empire with a common religion, and thereafter the religion spread quite rapidly.

In the case of China, by contrast, Buddhism came from India, far beyond the Chinese world. It was introduced to China by Central Asian traders and received little support from Han dynasty rulers. In fact, the religion spread only modestly among Chinese until after the Han dynasty collapsed (220 C.E.), when it appealed to people who felt bewildered by the loss of a predictable and stable society. Not until the Sui (sway) dynasty emperor Wendi (r. 581–604 C.E.) reunified China did the new religion gain state support, and then only temporarily. Buddhism thus became one of several alternative cultural traditions in a complex Chinese mix, while Christianity, though divided internally, ultimately became the dominant religious tradition throughout Europe (see Chapters 8 and 10).

The Roman and Chinese empires also had a different relationship to the societies they governed. Rome’s beginnings as a small city-state meant that Romans, and even Italians, were always a distinct minority within the empire. The Chinese empire, by contrast, grew out of a much larger cultural heartland, already ethnically Chinese. Furthermore, as the Chinese state expanded, especially to the south, it actively assimilated the non-Chinese, or “barbarian,” people. In short, they became Chinese, culturally, linguistically, and through intermarriage in physical appearance as well. Many Chinese in modern times are in fact descended from people who at one point or another were not Chinese at all.

The Roman Empire offered a different kind of assimilation to its subject peoples. Gradually and somewhat reluctantly, the empire granted Roman citizenship to various individuals, families, or whole communities for their service to the empire

AP® EXAM TIP

You must know the significance of China’s Mandate of Heaven.

AP® EXAM TIP

Take good notes on the development and spread of religions during the classical era, both here and in Chapter 4.

or in recognition of their adoption of Roman culture. In 212 C.E., Roman citizenship was bestowed on almost all free people of the empire. Citizenship offered clear advantages—the right to hold public office, to serve in the Roman military units known as legions, to wear a toga, and more—but it conveyed a legal status, rather than cultural assimilation, and certainly did not erase other identities, such as being Greek, Egyptian, or a citizen of a particular city.

Various elements of Roman culture—its public buildings, its religious rituals, its Latin language, its style of city life—were attractive, especially in Western Europe, where urban civilization was something new. In the eastern half of the empire, however, things Greek retained tremendous prestige. Many elite Romans in fact regarded Greek culture—its literature, philosophy, and art—as superior to their own and proudly sent their sons to Athens for a Greek education. To some extent, the two blended into a mixed Greco-Roman tradition, which the empire served to disseminate throughout the realm. Other non-Roman cultural traditions—such as the cult of the Persian god Mithra or the compassionate Egyptian goddess Isis, and, most extensively, the Jewish-derived religion of Christianity—also spread throughout the empire. Nothing similar occurred in Han dynasty China, except for Buddhism, which established a modest presence, largely among foreigners. Chinese culture experienced little competition from older, venerated, or foreign traditions. It was widely recognized across much of East Asia—in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, for example—as the model to which others should conform.

Language served these two empires in important but contrasting ways. Latin, an alphabetic language depicting sounds, gave rise to various distinct languages—Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, Romanian—whereas Chinese did not. Chinese characters, which represented words or ideas more than sounds, were not easily transferable to other languages. Written Chinese, however, could be understood by all literate people, no matter which spoken dialect of the language they used. Thus Chinese, more than Latin, served as an instrument of elite assimilation. For all of these reasons, the various peoples of the Roman Empire were able to maintain their separate cultural identities far more than was the case in China.

Politically, both empires established effective centralized control over vast regions and huge populations, but the Chinese, far more than the Romans, developed an elaborate bureaucracy to hold the empire together. The Han emperor Wudi (r. 141–87 B.C.E.) established an imperial academy for training officials for an emerging bureaucracy with a curriculum based on the writings of Confucius. This was the beginning of a civil service system, complete with examinations and selection by merit, which did much to integrate the Chinese empire and lasted into the early twentieth century. Roman administration was a somewhat ramshackle affair, relying more on regional aristocratic elites and the army to provide cohesion. Unlike the Chinese, however, the Romans developed an elaborate body of law, applicable equally to all people of the realm, dealing with matters of justice, property, commerce, and family life. Chinese and Roman political development thus generated

AP® EXAM TIP

You could see an AP® exam question on the functions of China's bureaucracy over time—especially the examination system.

different answers to the question of what made for good government. For those who inherited the Roman tradition, it was good laws, whereas for those in the Chinese tradition, it was good men.

Finally, both Roman and Chinese civilizations had marked effects on the environment in various ways. The Roman poet Horace complained of the noise and smoke of the city and objected to the urban sprawl that extended into the adjacent fertile lands. Roman mining operations, the smelting of metals, its large-scale agriculture, and its growing population—all of this led to extensive deforestation and consequent soil erosion. The shortage of wood in the heartland of the empire led to the relocation of some ceramic workshops to Gaul, where timber was more plentiful. Lead pollution, derived from the smelting of lead ores in open furnaces and from lead water pipes and cooking pots, shows up in the bones of Roman burials and in bones found as far away as Greenland, where studies of the icecap indicate that lead in the atmosphere increased during Roman times. Here is perhaps the earliest example of international atmospheric pollution.

Large-scale Chinese ironworking during the Han dynasty likewise contributed to substantial urban air pollution, while a rapidly growing and dense population practicing intensive agriculture stripped the North China plain of its ancient forest cover, causing sufficient soil erosion to turn the Hwang-ho River its characteristic yellow-brown color. What had been known simply as “the River” now became the Yellow River, which frequently flooded with devastating results and over many centuries dramatically changed course. In addition, as China expanded north and west into the steppe lands of the pastoral peoples, military/agricultural colonies of Chinese farmers turned pasturelands into farmlands, plowing up long-established sod. When the Chinese state subsequently grew weaker or actually collapsed, such farms were abandoned, wind erosion took hold, and deserts emerged.¹⁴

The Collapse of Empires

Empires rise, and then, with some apparent regularity, they fall, and in doing so, they provide historians with one of their most intriguing questions: what causes the collapse of these once-mighty structures? In China, the Han dynasty empire came to an end in 220 C.E.; the traditional date for the final disintegration of the Roman Empire is 476 C.E., although a process of decline had been under way for several centuries. In the Roman case, however, only the western half of the empire collapsed, while the eastern part, subsequently known as the Byzantine Empire, maintained the tradition of imperial Rome for another thousand years.

Despite these differences, a number of common factors have been associated with the end of these imperial states. At one level, they both simply got too big, too overextended, and too expensive to be sustained by the available resources, and no fundamental technological breakthrough was available to enlarge these resources. Furthermore, the growth of large landowning families with huge estates and political

AP® EXAM TIP

The internal and external reasons for the fall of the classical empires is “must know” information for the AP® exam.

The Kushan Empire

Often lost among the giant second-wave empires of Persia, Macedonia/Greece, Rome, China, and India is the story of a smaller empire—that of the Kushan people—whose Central Asian state interacted directly or indirectly with all the others. At its height during the first two centuries of the Common Era, the Kushan Empire, according to one recent account, “created stable conditions at the heart of Central Asia, allowing for the great flowering of trans-Eurasian mercantile and cultural exchange that occurred along the Silk Roads.”¹⁵

The Kushans, originally a pastoral nomadic people from an area around Dunhuang at the far western edge of China, had migrated in the early centuries B.C.E. to the region that now makes up northwestern India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan, where they established a sizable and prosperous empire linked to the Silk Road trading network. It was a remarkably cosmopolitan place, illustrating the mixing and blending of many cultural



A pendant from the Kushan Empire.

traditions. Since parts of this empire had earlier been ruled by Alexander the Great and his Greek successors (see pages 114–17), classical Mediterranean culture was a prominent element of Kushan life. The Kushans used the Greek alphabet to write their official language, which was derived from India.

Roman bronze and glassware items have been found in Kushan merchant warehouses, and scholars suspect that Roman gold coins, used to pay for Eastern imports, were melted down and recast as Kushan coins. From the other end of Eurasia, Kushans imported Chinese lacquer goods, and on at least one occasion, Kushan military forces clashed with those of an expanding Han dynasty China. The greatest of the Kushan rulers, Kanishka (r. ca. 127–153 C.E.), styled himself “Great King, King of Kings, Son of God,” a title that had both Persian and Chinese precedents.

photo: Victoria & Albert Museum/V&A Images/Art Resource, NY

clout enabled them to avoid paying taxes, turned free peasants into impoverished tenant farmers, and diminished the authority of the central government. In China, such conditions led to a major peasant revolt, known as the Yellow Turban Rebellion, in 184 C.E. (see Chapter 5, pages 197–98).

Rivalry among elite factions created instability in both empires and eroded imperial authority. In China, persistent tension between castrated court officials (eunuchs) loyal to the emperor and Confucian-educated scholar-bureaucrats weakened the state. In the Roman Empire between 235 and 284 C.E., some twenty-six individuals claimed the title of Roman emperor, only one of whom died of natural causes. In addition, epidemic disease ravaged both societies, though more extensively in the Roman world. The population of the Roman Empire declined by 25 percent in the two centuries following 250 C.E., a demographic disaster that meant diminished production, less revenue for the state, and fewer men available for the defense of the empire’s long frontiers.

Religiously, the Kushan Empire was a diverse and apparently tolerant place. Hindu devotional cults as well as Buddhism flourished, and evidence of Persian Zoroastrian religious practice is found on many Kushan coins, which depict the ruler conducting a sacrifice over a fire altar. It was in the Kushan realm that the earliest human representations of the Buddha were sculpted, and often with distinctly Greek features. (See Working with Evidence, Source 4.2, page 186.) Despite these outside influences, Kushan artists recalled their nomadic past as they depicted their rulers in typical steppe nomadic style: on horseback, wearing loose trousers, heavy boots, and knee-length robes.

A Kushan pendant dating to the fourth century C.E., shown opposite, illustrates the cultural blending so characteristic of Kushan life. It features Hariti, originally a fearsome Hindu goddess who abducted and killed children, feeding their flesh to her own offspring. But in an encounter with the Buddha, Hariti repented and was transformed into a compassionate protector of children. Here she is depicted holding in her right hand a lotus blossom, a prominent Buddhist symbol; her left hand holds another lotus flower supporting a flask or cornucopia overflowing with pomegranates (symbolizing

food and abundance). According to local mythology, the Buddha had offered Hariti pomegranates (often said to resemble human flesh) as a substitute for the children she was devouring.

While the content of this pendant is thoroughly Indian and Buddhist, its representation of Hariti was probably modeled after the Greek goddess Tyche (TEE-chee), also portrayed holding a cornucopia. Furthermore, her short tunic worn with a belt was likewise of Greek or Hellenistic origin. And the border of pearls and stylized flowers that surround the image derives from Persia.

During the time of the Kushan Empire, Central Asia, so often regarded as a backwater in recent centuries, was a place where the political, cultural, and economic influences of all the Eurasian civilizations overlapped and intermingled. For those several centuries, the Kushan Empire was at the center of an interacting world.

Questions: How does the Kushan Empire challenge impressions that second-wave civilizations of Eurasia existed in isolation from one another? Why do you think the Kushan artist who created this pendant chose to weave together so many distinct cultural strands?

Historians have often linked the collapse of empires with environmental factors as well, more often with reference to Rome than to Han dynasty China. Considerable fluctuations in the climate after about 250 C.E. led to drought in the third century, cold and wet conditions in the fourth, and increased rainfall and cooler temperatures in the fifth, all of which generated substantial soil erosion and declining agricultural productivity. The North African breadbasket of the empire suffered from serious salinization and increasingly desert-like conditions. The extent to which such factors contributed to the collapse of the Roman Empire remains a point of dispute among scholars.

To these mounting internal problems was added a growing threat from nomadic or semi-agricultural peoples occupying the frontier regions of both empires. The Chinese had long developed various ways of dealing with the Xiongnu and other nomadic people to the north—building the Great Wall to keep them out, offering them trading opportunities at border markets, buying them off with lavish gifts,

AP® EXAM TIP

A major theme in AP® World History is the interaction between humans and the environment.

Guided Reading Question

■ CHANGE

What internal and external factors contributed to the collapse of the Roman and Chinese empires?



Meeting of Attila and Pope Leo I

Among the “barbarian” invaders of the Roman Empire, none were more feared than the Huns, led by the infamous Attila. In a celebrated meeting in 452 c.e., Pope Leo I persuaded Attila to spare the city of Rome and to withdraw from Italy. This seventeenth-century Spanish painting records one view of that remarkable meeting. (Mural in church, El Hospital de Los Venerables, Seville, Spain/© Islandstock/Alamy)

contracting marriage alliances with nomadic leaders, and conducting periodic military campaigns against them. But as the Han dynasty weakened in the second and third centuries c.e., such peoples more easily breached the frontier defenses and set up a succession of “barbarian states” in north China. Culturally, however, many of these foreign rulers gradually became Chinese, encouraging intermarriage, adopting Chinese dress, and setting up their courts in Chinese fashion.

A weakening Roman Empire likewise faced serious problems from Germanic-speaking peoples living on its northern frontier. Growing numbers of these people began to enter the empire in the fourth century c.e.—some as mercenaries in Roman armies and others as refugees fleeing the invasions of the ferocious Huns, who were penetrating Europe from Central Asia. Once inside the declining empire, various Germanic groups established their own kingdoms, at first controlling Roman emperors and then displacing them altogether by 476 c.e. Unlike the nomadic groups in China, who largely assimilated Chinese culture, Germanic kingdoms in Europe developed their own ethnic identities—Visigoths, Franks, Anglo-Saxons, and others—even as they drew on Roman law and adopted Roman Christianity. Far more than in China, the fall of the western Roman Empire produced a new culture, blending Latin and Germanic elements, which provided the foundation for the hybrid civilization that would arise in Western Europe.

The collapse of empire meant more than the disappearance of centralized government and endemic conflict. In post-Han China and post-Roman Europe, it also

AP® EXAM TIP

You should know the effects that various invaders had on the decline and fall of classical empires.

meant the decline of urban life, a contracting population, less area under cultivation, diminishing international trade, and vast insecurity for ordinary people. It must have seemed that civilization itself was unraveling.

The most significant difference between the collapse of empire in China and that in the western Roman Empire lay in what happened next. In China, after about 350 years of disunion, disorder, frequent warfare, and political chaos, a Chinese imperial state, similar to that of the Han dynasty, was reassembled under the Sui (589–618 C.E.), Tang (618–907), and Song (960–1279) dynasties. Once again, a single emperor ruled; a bureaucracy selected by examinations governed; and the ideas of Confucius informed the political system. Such a Chinese empire persisted into the early twentieth century, establishing one of the most continuous political traditions of any civilization in world history.

The story line of European history following the end of the western Roman Empire was very different indeed. No large-scale, centralized, imperial authority encompassing all of Western Europe has ever been successfully reestablished there for any length of time. The memory of Roman imperial unity certainly persisted, and many subsequently tried unsuccessfully to re-create it. But most of Western Europe dissolved into highly decentralized political systems involving nobles, knights and vassals, kings with little authority, various city-states in Italy, and small territories ruled by princes, bishops, or the pope. From this point on, Europe would be a civilization without an encompassing imperial state.

From a Chinese point of view, Western Europe's post-Roman history must seem an enormous failure. Why were Europeans unable to reconstruct something of the unity of their classical empire, while the Chinese clearly did? Surely the greater cultural homogeneity of Chinese civilization made that task easier than it was amid the vast ethnic and linguistic diversity of Europe. The absence in the Roman legacy of a strong bureaucratic tradition also contributed to European difficulties, whereas in China the bureaucracy provided some stability even as dynasties came and went. The Chinese also had in Confucianism a largely secular ideology that placed great value on political matters in the here and now. The Roman Catholic Church in Europe, however, was frequently at odds with state authorities, and its "otherworldliness" did little to support the creation of large-scale empires. Finally, Chinese agriculture was much more productive than that of Europe, and for a long time its metallurgy was more advanced.¹⁶ These conditions gave Chinese state builders more resources to work with than were available to their European counterparts.

AP® EXAM TIP

Be sure to know similarities and differences in the effects that the fall of classical empires had on their societies.

PRACTICING AP® HISTORICAL THINKING

In comparing the Roman and Chinese empires, which do you find more striking—their similarities or their differences?

Intermittent Empire: The Case of India

Among the second-wave civilizations of Eurasia, empire loomed large in Persian, Mediterranean, and Chinese history, but it played a rather less prominent role in Indian history. In the Indus River valley flourished the largest of the First Civilizations,

embodied in exquisitely planned cities such as Harappa but with little evidence of any central political authority (see Chapter 2). The demise of this early civilization by 1500 B.C.E. was followed over the next thousand years by the creation of a new civilization based farther east, along the Ganges River on India's northern plain. That process has occasioned considerable debate, which has focused on the role of the Aryans, a pastoral Indo-European people long thought to have invaded and destroyed the Indus Valley civilization and then created the new one along the Ganges. More recent research questions this interpretation. Did the Aryans invade suddenly, or did they migrate slowly into the Indus River valley? Were they already there as a part of the Indus Valley population? Was the new civilization largely the work of Aryans, or did it evolve gradually from Indus Valley culture? Scholars have yet to reach agreement on any of these questions.¹⁷

Guided Reading Question

COMPARISON

Why were centralized empires so much less prominent in India than in China?

However it occurred, by 600 B.C.E. what would become the second-wave civilization of South Asia had begun to take shape across northern India. Politically, that civilization emerged as a fragmented collection of towns and cities, some small republics governed by public assemblies, and a number of regional states ruled by kings. An astonishing range of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity also characterized this civilization, as an endless variety of peoples migrated into India from Central Asia across the mountain passes in the northwest. These features of Indian civilization—political fragmentation and vast cultural diversity—have informed much of South Asian history throughout many centuries, offering a sharp contrast to the pattern of development in China. What gave Indian civilization a recognizable identity and character was neither an imperial tradition nor ethno-linguistic commonality, but rather a distinctive religious tradition, known later to outsiders as Hinduism, and a unique social organization, the caste system. These features of Indian life are explored further in Chapters 4 and 5.

Nonetheless, empires and emperors were not entirely unknown in India's long history. Northwestern India had been briefly ruled by the Persian Empire and then conquered by Alexander the Great. These Persian and Greek influences helped stimulate the first and largest of India's short experiments with a large-scale political system, the Mauryan Empire (326–184 B.C.E.), which encompassed all but the southern tip of the subcontinent (see Map 3.6).

The Mauryan Empire was an impressive political structure, equivalent to the Persian, Chinese, and Roman empires, though not nearly as long-lasting. With a population of perhaps 50 million, the Mauryan Empire boasted a large military force, reported to include 600,000 infantry soldiers, 30,000 cavalry, 8,000 chariots, and 9,000 elephants. A civilian bureaucracy featured various ministries and a large contingent of spies to provide the rulers with local information. A famous treatise called the *Arthashastra* (*The Science of Worldly Wealth*) articulated a pragmatic, even amoral, political philosophy for Mauryan rulers. It was, according to one scholar, a book that showed “how the political world does work and not very often stating how it ought to work, a book that frequently discloses to a king what calculating

AP® EXAM TIP

Be prepared to compare the features of classical empires, like those of India, Rome, and China in this era.

and sometimes brutal measures he must carry out to preserve the state and the common good.”¹⁸ The state also operated many industries—spinning, weaving, mining, shipbuilding, and armaments. This complex apparatus was financed by taxes on trade, on herds of animals, and especially on land, from which the monarch claimed a quarter or more of the crop.

Mauryan India is perhaps best known for one of its emperors, Ashoka (r. 268–232 B.C.E.), who left a record of his activities and his thinking in a series of edicts carved on rocks and pillars throughout the kingdom. Ashoka’s conversion to Buddhism and his moralistic approach to governance gave his reign a different tone than that of China’s Shihuangdi or Greece’s Alexander the Great, who, according to legend, wept because he had no more worlds to conquer. Ashoka’s legacy to modern India has been that of an enlightened ruler, who sought to govern in accord with the religious values and moral teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism.

Despite their good intentions, these policies did not long preserve the empire, which broke apart soon after Ashoka’s death. About 600 years later, a second brief imperial experiment, known as the Gupta Empire (320–550 C.E.), took shape. Faxian, a Chinese Buddhist traveler in India at the time, noted a generally peaceful, tolerant, and prosperous land, commenting that the ruler “governs without decapitation or corporal punishment.” Free hospitals, he reported, were available to “the destitute, crippled and diseased,” but he also noticed “untouchables” carrying bells to warn upper-caste people of their polluting presence.¹⁹ Culturally, the Gupta era witnessed a flourishing of art, literature, temple building, science, mathematics, and medicine, much of it patronized by rulers. Indian trade with China also thrived, and elements of Buddhist and Hindu culture took root in Southeast Asia (see Chapter 7). Indian commerce reached as far as the Roman world. A Germanic leader named Alaric laid siege to Rome in 410 C.E., while demanding 3,000 pounds of Indian pepper to spare the city.



Map 3.6 Empire in South Asia

Large-scale empires in the Indian subcontinent were less frequent and less enduring than those in China. Two of the largest efforts were those of the Mauryan and Gupta dynasties.

AP[®] EXAM TIP

On the AP[®] exam, the Mauryan and Gupta empires are often combined.



The Great Stupa

The Great Stupa of Sanchi, the oldest stone building in India, was commissioned by Ashoka in the third century B.C.E. to house precious relics of the Buddha. (© Luca Tettoni/Bridgeman Images)

Thus India's political history resembled that of Western Europe after the collapse of the Roman Empire far more than that of China or Persia. Neither imperial nor regional states commanded the kind of loyalty or exercised the degree of influence that they did in other second-wave civilizations. India's unparalleled cultural diversity surely was one reason, as was the frequency of invasions from Central Asia, which repeatedly smashed emerging states that might have provided the nucleus for an all-India empire. Finally, India's social structure, embodied in a caste system linked to occupational groups, made for intensely local loyalties at the expense of wider identities (see Chapter 5).

Nonetheless, a frequently vibrant economy fostered a lively internal commerce and made India the focal point of an extensive network of trade in the Indian Ocean basin. In particular, its cotton textile industry long supplied cloth throughout the Afro-Eurasian world. Strong guilds of merchants and artisans provided political leadership in major towns and cities, and their wealth supported lavish temples, public buildings, and religious festivals. Great creativity in religious matters generated Hindu and Buddhist traditions that later penetrated much of Asia. Indian mathematics and science, especially astronomy, were also impressive; Indian

AP® EXAM TIP

Take notes on the Indian Ocean trade network, both here and in Chapter 7.

scientists plotted the movements of stars and planets and recognized quite early that the earth was round. Clearly, the absence of consistent imperial unity did not prevent the evolution of a lasting civilization.

REFLECTIONS

Enduring Legacies of Second-Wave Empires

The second-wave empires discussed in this chapter have long ago passed into history, but their descendants have kept them alive in memory, for they have proved useful, even in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Those empires have provided legitimacy for contemporary states, inspiration for new imperial ventures, and abundant warnings and cautions for those seeking to criticize more recent empires. For example, in bringing communism to China in the twentieth century, the Chinese leader Mao Zedong compared himself to Shihuangdi, the unifier of China and the brutal founder of its Qin dynasty. Reflecting on his campaign against intellectuals in general and Confucianism in particular, Mao declared to a Communist Party conference: “Emperor Qin Shihuang was not that outstanding. He only buried alive 460 Confucian scholars. We buried 460 thousand Confucian scholars. . . . To the charge of being like Emperor Qin, of being a dictator, we plead guilty.”²⁰

In contrast, modern-day Indians, who have sought to present their country as a model of cultural tolerance and nonviolence, have been quick to link themselves to Ashoka and his policies of inclusiveness. When the country became independent from British colonial rule in 1947, India soon placed an image of Ashoka’s Pillar on the new nation’s currency.

In the West, it has been the Roman Empire that has provided a template for thinking about political life. Many in Great Britain celebrated their own global empire as a modern version of the Roman Empire. If the British had been “civilized” by Roman rule, then surely Africans and Asians would benefit from falling under the control of the “superior” British. Likewise, to the Italian fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, his country’s territorial expansion during the 1930s and World War II represented the creation of a new Roman Empire. Most recently, the United States’ dominant role in the world has prompted the question, are the Americans the new Romans?

Historians frequently cringe as politicians and students use (and perhaps misuse) historical analogies to make their case for particular points of view in the present. But we have little else to go on except history in making our way through the complexities of contemporary life, and historians themselves seldom agree on the “lessons” of the past. Lively debate about the continuing relevance of these ancient empires shows that although the past may be gone, it surely is not dead.

AP® EXAM TIP

Study this essay about the long-term effects of the classical empires for insights into writing comparison essays that contain specific examples.

Chapter Review

What's the Significance?

Persian Empire, 108	Qin Shihuangdi, 122
Athenian democracy, 112	Han dynasty, 122
Greco-Persian Wars, 113	Trung Trac, 124
Alexander the Great, 114	Kushan Empire, 128
Hellenistic era, 115	Mauryan Empire, 132
Augustus, 121	Ashoka, 133
<i>pax Romana</i> , 121	

Big Picture Questions

1. What common features can you identify in the empires described in this chapter? In what ways did they differ from one another? What accounts for those differences?
2. Are you more impressed with the “greatness” of empires or with their destructive and oppressive features? Why?
3. Do you think that these second-wave empires hold “lessons” for the present, or are contemporary circumstances sufficiently unique as to render the distant past irrelevant?
4. **Looking Back:** How do these empires of the second-wave civilizations differ from the political systems of the First Civilizations?

Next Steps: For Further Study

Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History* (2010). A fascinating account by two major scholars of the imperial theme across the world. Chapter 2 compares the Roman and Chinese empires.

Arthur Cotterell, *The First Emperor of China* (1988). A biography of Shihuangdi.

Christopher Kelley, *The Roman Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (2006). A brief, up-to-date, and accessible account of the Roman achievement.

Cullen Murphy, *Are We Rome? The Fall of an Empire and the Fate of America* (2007). A reflection on the usefulness and the dangers of comparing the Roman Empire to the present-day United States.

Sarah Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece* (1999). A highly readable survey of Greek history by a team of distinguished scholars.

Romila Thapar, *Ashoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (1961). A classic study of India's early empire builder.

Illustrated History of the Roman Empire, <http://www.roman-empire.net>. An interactive Web site with maps, pictures, and much information about the Roman Empire.

The Story of Han Dynasty, episode 1, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9U45tvzxP74>. The first episode of a Chinese TV series dramatizing the founding of the Han dynasty, with English subtitles.

WORKING WITH EVIDENCE

Perceptions of Outsiders
in the Ancient World

The peoples of ancient Eurasia did not live in splendid isolation from one another. Nor did they inhabit the kind of deeply interconnected and globalized world that the past century has created. But through war, commerce, the migration of peoples, the spread of religions, and sheer geographic proximity, some of those peoples became sharply aware of one another.

Thus the Greeks went to war with Persia, and a few of them visited or lived in Egypt. Romans derived their much-beloved pepper from India and some silk from China, while facing those they regarded as “barbarians” in the European lands to the north of their imperial boundaries. For many centuries, the Chinese too had to deal with their own “barbarians” beyond the Great Wall, even as Chinese Buddhist pilgrims sought out the sources of their faith in India. These are but a few of the cross-cultural encounters that helped to shape histories of ancient peoples.

Such encounters with strangers have long been an important motor of change in human history, as foreign ideas, diseases, goods, technologies, and military challenges required adjustment in established ways of living. Here, however, we are more interested in the perceptions or understandings of outsiders that arose from these interactions, mental images of life beyond the familiar confines of one’s own culture. How do we understand those who are “other” than ourselves? What distortions arise as we ponder those outside our circle? How can the “other” provide opportunities to question or critique one’s own society? The documents that follow provide three examples of this process from the ancient world.

Source 3.1

A Greek Historian on Persia and Egypt

Born to a wealthy Greek family in Asia Minor, Herodotus (ca. 485–425 B.C.E.) came of age when the wars between the Greeks and Persians were still recent memories. He devoted much of his life to recording the history of that great conflict in a series of books known as *The Histories*. In doing so, he pretty much invented for the Western world the craft of history as a systematic and

connected narrative based on research. As a man of means, he was able to travel widely in the Persian Empire, Egypt, Syria, Babylon, Sicily, and Italy, making notes of what he saw and collecting stories, myths, and oral recollections along the way. The selection that follows contains some of his personal impressions of Persia and Egypt.

- What cultural differences does Herodotus notice between Greek ways of living and those of Persia and Egypt?
- What posture does Herodotus take toward these differences? He does refer to Persians as “barbarians,” but at the time that term may have meant simply “non-Greek,” without the implication of “savage” or “uncivilized” that it later acquired. Does he express a critical view of the Persians and Egyptians or a more positive understanding?
- What parts of these accounts might be helpful to historians seeking to describe life in ancient Persia or Egypt? What might a historian learn about Greek culture itself from these descriptions?

HERODOTUS

The Histories

Mid-Fifth Century B.C.E.

On Persians

The customs that I know the Persians follow are these. They have no images of the gods and no temples or altars; they consider the use of them a sign of foolishness. This comes, I think, from their not believing the gods to have the same nature as human beings, as the Greeks imagine. The Persians' practice is to climb to the tops of the highest mountains to offer sacrifices to Zeus, the Greek name for the chief god of the universe. The Persians use this god's name to refer to the whole extent of the sky. They also sacrifice to the sun and moon, to the earth, to fire, to water, and to the winds. . . .

The Persians offer sacrifice to these gods in the following way: They do not construct an altar, light a fire, or pour a libation, and there is no flute music, no wearing of garlands, and no consecrated barley cake. The person who wishes to sacrifice brings the victim to a spot of ground that is pure from ritual pollution and there calls upon the name

of the god for whom the sacrifice is meant. It is usual to have one's turban encircled with a wreath, most commonly of myrtle. The sacrificer is not allowed to pray for blessings on himself alone, but he prays for the welfare of the king and of the whole Persian people, among whom he is necessarily included. He cuts the [animal] victim in pieces, and having boiled the meat, he lays it out on the softest grass that he can find, clover in particular. When everything is ready, one of the mages [priests] comes forward and chants a hymn, which they say describes the origins of the gods. . . . After a short time, the sacrificer carries the meat of the victim away with him to use as he likes.

Of all the days in the year, the one they celebrate the most is their birthday. It is customary to serve much more food on that day than usual. The richer Persians have an ox, a horse, a camel, and an ass roasted whole for the meal; poorer people cook smaller kinds of cattle. They eat relatively few main courses but many extra courses, which they serve a

few dishes at a time. For this reason, the Persians say that the Greeks leave a meal hungry because they have nothing worth mentioning served to them as an extra after the meats and that if the Greeks did have extra courses served, they would never stop eating. The Persians love wine and drink large amounts of it. . . .

When they meet another person in the street, you can tell if the people meeting are of equal status by the following indication: If they are, instead of speaking, they kiss each other on the lips. In the case where one is a little inferior to the other, the kiss is given on the cheek. Where the difference of rank is great, the inferior lies down on the ground in front of the superior. . . . The farther away other peoples live, the less the Persians respect them. The reason is that they regard themselves as very greatly superior in all respects to the rest of humanity, believing that other peoples' excellence is directly proportional to how close they live to Persia. . . .

No one so readily adopts foreign customs as the Persians. For this reason, they wear clothing like that of the Medes, considering it superior to their own. In war, they wear Egyptian armor to protect their chests. As soon as they hear of any luxury from any country, they instantly make it their own. In particular, they learned from the Greeks to have sex with adolescent boys. Each man has several wives and an even greater number of concubines.

In terms of manliness, manly courage on the battlefield is the greatest proof, with fathering many sons the second greatest. . . . They carefully educate their sons from the age of five to the age of twenty in only three subjects: riding horses, shooting arrows, and speaking the truth. Until boys are five, they are not allowed to come into the sight of their fathers, but instead spend their time with the women. They do this so that if the child dies young, the father will not be saddened at losing him.

I praise this custom and the following one too. The king does not put anyone to death for a single instance of wrong-doing, and no Persian inflicts an extreme penalty on a slave for a single instance of wrong-doing.

I can say all these things about the Persians with complete certainty, relying on my own personal knowledge.

On Egyptians

Concerning Egypt itself I am going to say a great deal because there is no country that possesses so many amazing things or has such a large number of buildings and monuments that defy description. Not only is the climate different from that of the rest of the world and the rivers unlike any other rivers, but the people also, in the majority of their ways and customs, exactly reverse what the rest of humanity usually does. The women there participate in the markets and in trade, while the men sit at home weaving on a loom. And while the rest of the world works the woof up the warp while weaving, the Egyptians work it down. The women also carry loads on their shoulders, while the men carry them on their heads. They eat their food out-of-doors in the streets, but they withdraw into their houses to go to the bathroom, explaining that what is shameful but necessary should be done in private, but that which has nothing shameful about it should be done openly. A woman cannot serve as a priest, either for a god or a goddess, but men are priests for both. Sons are not required to support their parents unless they choose to do so, but daughters must, whether they want to or not.

In other countries, the priests have long hair, but in Egypt their heads are shaved. In other lands, it is customary for close relatives while mourning their dead to cut their hair short. The Egyptians, who shave their hair the rest of the time, let their beards and the hair on their heads grow long when a relative dies. All other people live their lives separate from animals, but the Egyptians always have animals living with them. Others make barley and wheat their food; it is a disgrace to do so in Egypt, where the grain they live on is spelt, which some call *zea* [a distinct form of wheat, sometimes known as emmer]. They knead dough with their feet, but they mix clay, and even pick up dung, with their hands. They are the only people in the world, except for those who learned it from them, to use circumcision. . . . When they write or do math,

they move their hand from right to left, instead of writing from left to right, like the Greeks. They insist that their method is “right-handed” and therefore dexterous, but that the Greeks’ method is “left-handed” and awkward. They have two quite different kinds of writing, one of which is called sacred, the other “of the people.”

They are excessively religious, far beyond any other peoples. . . . They drink out of bronze cups,

which they clean every day. They wear linen clothes, which they are especially careful to have always freshly washed. They practice circumcision for the sake of cleanliness, considering it better to be clean than attractive.

Source: Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1:131–37, 140; 2:35–37, in Thomas R. Martin, ed., *Herodotus and Sima Qian: The First Great Historians of Greece and China* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010), 46–51.

Source 3.2

A Roman Historian on the Germans

Occupying much of Central Europe north of the Roman Empire, ancient Germanic-speaking peoples were never a single “nation” but rather a collection of tribes, clans, and chiefdoms. They were regarded by the Romans as barbarians, though admired and feared for their military skills. These Germanic peoples were famously described by Tacitus (56–117 C.E.), a Roman official and well-known historian. Tacitus himself had never visited the lands of the people he describes; rather, he relied on earlier written documents and interviews with merchants and soldiers who had traveled and lived in the region. Unlike Herodotus, he wrote about people who lived without the states and cities characteristic of civilizations.

- What can we learn from Tacitus’s account about the economy, politics, society, and culture of the Germanic peoples of the first century C.E.?
- Which statements of Tacitus might you regard as reliable, and which are more suspect? Why?
- Why did Tacitus regard Germanic peoples as distinctly inferior to Romans? How might he have responded to the idea that these people would play a major role in the collapse of the Roman Empire several centuries later?
- Modern scholars have argued that Tacitus used the Germanic peoples to criticize aspects of his own Roman culture. What evidence might support this point of view?
- What differences might you notice between Herodotus’s description of neighboring civilizations and Tacitus’s discussion of an agricultural village society?

TACITUS

Germania

First Century C.E.

The Germans themselves I should regard as aboriginal, and not mixed at all with other races through immigration or intercourse. . . . [W]ho would leave Asia, or Africa, or Italy for Germany, with its wild country, its inclement skies, its sullen manners and aspect, unless indeed it were his home? In their ancient songs, their only way of remembering or recording the past, they celebrate an earth-born god, Tuisco, and his son Mannus, as the origin of their race, as their founders. . . .

The tribes of Germany are free from all taint of intermarriages with foreign nations, and they appear as a distinct, unmixed race, like none but themselves. Hence, too, the same physical peculiarities throughout so vast a population. All have fierce blue eyes, red hair, huge frames, fit only for a sudden exertion. They are less able to bear laborious work. Heat and thirst they cannot in the least endure; to cold and hunger their climate and their soil inure them. . . .

They choose their kings by birth, their generals by merit. These kings have not unlimited or arbitrary power, and the generals do more by example than by authority. . . . But to reprimand, to imprison, even to flog, is permitted to the priests alone, and that not as a punishment, or at the general's bidding, but, as it were, by the mandate of the god whom they believe to inspire the warrior. . . . And what most stimulates their courage is that their squadrons or battalions, instead of being formed by chance or by a fortuitous gathering, are composed of families and clans. Close by them, too, are those dearest to them, so that they hear the shrieks of women, the cries of infants. . . .

Tradition says that armies already wavering and giving way have been rallied by women who, with earnest entreaties and bosoms laid bare, have vividly represented the horrors of captivity, which the Germans fear with such extreme dread on behalf of their women. . . . They even believe that the female sex has a certain sanctity and prescience, and they

do not despise their counsels, or make light of their answers. . . .

Mercury is the deity whom they chiefly worship, and on certain days they deem it right to sacrifice to him even with human victims. . . .

Augury and divination by lot no people practice more diligently. . . . In public questions the priest of the particular state, in private the father of the family, invokes the gods, and, with his eyes toward heaven, takes up each piece [of a small tree branch] three times, and finds in them a meaning according to the mark previously impressed on them. . . .

When they go into battle, it is a disgrace for the chief to be surpassed in valor, a disgrace for his followers not to equal the valor of the chief. And it is an infamy and a reproach for life to have survived the chief, and return from the field. To defend, to protect him, to ascribe one's own brave deeds to his renown, is the height of loyalty. The chief fights for victory; his vassals fight for their chief. . . . Feasts and entertainments, which though inelegant, are plentifully furnished, are their only pay. The means of this bounty come from war or rapine. Nor are they as easily persuaded to plough the earth and to wait for the year's produce as to challenge an enemy and earn the honor of wounds. Nay, they actually think it tame and stupid to acquire by the sweat of toil what they might win by their blood.

Whenever they are not fighting, they pass much of their time in hunting, and still more in idleness, giving themselves up to sleep and to feasting, the bravest and the most warlike doing nothing, and surrendering the management of the household of the home, and of the land, to the women, the old men, and all the weakest members of the family. . . . It is the custom of the states to bestow by voluntary and individual contribution on the chief a present of cattle or of grain, which, while accepted as a compliment, supplies their wants. They are particularly delighted by gifts from neighboring tribes . . . such as choice steeds, heavy armor, trappings, and

neckchains. We have now taught them to accept money also.

It is well known that the nations of Germany have no cities, and that they do not even tolerate closely contiguous dwellings. They live scattered and apart, just as a spring, a meadow, or a wood has attracted them. Their villages they do not arrange in our fashion, . . . but every person surrounds his dwelling with an open space, either as a precaution against the disasters of fire, or because they do not know how to build. No use is made by them of stone or tile; they employ timber for all purposes, rude masses without ornament or attractiveness. . . .

They all wrap themselves in a cloak which is fastened with a clasp, or, if this is not forthcoming, with a thorn, leaving the rest of their persons bare. . . . They also wear the skins of wild beasts. . . .

Their marriage code, however, is strict, and indeed no part of their manners is more praiseworthy. Almost alone among barbarians they are content with one wife, except a very few among them. . . . Lest the woman should think herself to stand apart from aspirations after noble deeds and from the perils of war, she is reminded by the ceremony which inaugurates marriage that she is her husband's partner in toil and danger, destined to suffer and to dare with him alike both in peace and in war. . . .

Very rare for so numerous a population is adultery, the punishment of which is prompt, and in the husband's power. Having cut off the hair of the adulteress and stripped her naked, he expels her from the house in the presence of her kinfolk, and then flogs her through the whole village. The loss of chastity meets with no indulgence; neither

beauty, youth, nor wealth will procure the culprit a husband.

No one in Germany laughs at vice, nor do they call it the fashion to corrupt and to be corrupted. . . . To limit the number of their children or to destroy any of their subsequent offspring is accounted infamous, and good habits are here more effectual than good laws elsewhere. . . .

It is the duty among them to adopt the feuds as well as the friendships of a father or a kinsman. These feuds are not implacable; even homicide is expiated by the payment of a certain number of cattle and of sheep, and the satisfaction is accepted by the entire family, greatly to the advantage of the state, since feuds are dangerous in proportion to a people's freedom. . . .

[S]laves are not employed after our manner with distinct domestic duties assigned to them, but each one has the management of a house and home of his own. The master requires from the slave a certain quantity of grain, of cattle, and of clothing, as he would from a tenant, and this is the limit of subjection. All other household functions are discharged by the wife and children. . . .

Of lending money on interest and increasing it by compound interest they know nothing—a more effectual safeguard than if it were prohibited.

Land proportioned to the number of inhabitants is occupied by the whole community in turn, and afterward divided among them according to rank. A wide expanse of plains makes the partition easy. They till fresh fields every year, and they have still more land than enough; . . . corn [wheat] is the only produce required from the earth.

Source: Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodrigg, *The Agricola and Germania of Tacitus* (London: Macmillan, 1877), 87ff.

Source 3.3

A Chinese Historian on the Xiongnu

During the time of the Han dynasty, the Chinese historian and high official Sima Qian (ca. 145–86 B.C.E.), like his Roman counterpart Tacitus, had occasion to observe and describe neighboring “barbarian” peoples and their history.

In Sima Qian's case, those people were the Xiongnu, pastoral nomads living to the north of China's Great Wall. China's fluctuating relationship with these peoples, involving war, trade, exchange of ambassadors, and periodic treaties, are described more fully in Chapter 8 (see pages 334–35). While the Chinese generally felt enormously superior to such “uncivilized” people, they were compelled on occasion to accommodate the military prowess of the Xiongnu. The following excerpts from Sima Qian's enormous history of ancient China illustrate his understanding of these people, who long represented a mirror through which the Chinese defined their image of themselves.

- Based on this document and what you know about Chinese life, what aspects of Xiongnu culture would likely appear most different or distasteful to Sima Qian?
- What purpose does the story about Maodun serve in this account?
- What can you infer about the relationship between China and the Xiongnu from the letter of Emperor Wen? How do you imagine he and Sima Qian felt about that letter?

SIMA QIAN

Records of the Grand Historian

ca. 100 B.C.E.

The ancestor of the Xiongnu descended from the ruler of the Xia dynasty, whose name was Qun Wei. From before the time of Emperors [of the third millennium B.C.E.], there have been barbarians . . . living in northern uncivilized areas and wandering around herding animals. They herd mainly horses, cattle, and sheep, but also some unusual animals, such as camels, donkeys, mules, and wild horses. . . . They move around looking for water and pasture and have no walled settlements or permanent housing. They do not farm, but they do divide their land into separate holdings under different leaders. They have no writing, and all contracts are verbal. When their children can ride a sheep, they begin to use bows and arrows to shoot birds and rodents. When they are older, they shoot foxes and rabbits for food. In this way, all the young men are easily able to become archers and serve as cavalry. It is their custom when times are easy to graze their animals and hunt with the bow

for their living, but when hard times come, they take up weapons to plunder and raid. This is their innate nature. Their long-range weapons are bows and arrows; they use swords and spears in close combat. When they have the advantage in battle, they advance, but if not, they retreat, since there is no shame in running away. They are only concerned with self-interest, knowing nothing of proper behavior or justice.

Everyone, including the chiefs, eats the meat of their domesticated animals and wears clothing of hides and coats of fur. The men who are in their prime eat the fattiest and best food, while the elderly eat what is left over, since the Xiongnu treasure the strong and healthy but place little value on the weak and old. When his father dies, a son marries his stepmother, and when brothers die, the surviving brothers marry their widows. They have personal names but no family names or additional names. . . .

[Then Sima Qian relates a story about how Maodun became the Xiongnu ruler in 209 B.C.E.]

Maodun had arrows made that whistled in flight and trained his men to shoot their bows as they were riding. He ordered, “He who does not shoot where my whistling arrow hits will be executed!” He then went out hunting birds and animals, and if any of his men failed to shoot at what he shot at with his whistling arrow, he immediately beheaded them. Next, he shot a whistling arrow at his own favorite horse. Some of his men hesitated, not daring to shoot the horse. Maodun beheaded them. A little later, he used a whistling arrow to shoot at his favorite wife. Again, some of his men, perhaps because they were afraid, did not dare to shoot. Once more, Maodun beheaded them. Later, he went hunting with his men and shot his father’s best horse. All his men shot it, too. Then Maodun knew that he could rely on his troops. Accompanying Touman [Maodun’s father] on a hunting trip, he shot a whistling arrow at his father. All his followers shot where the whistling arrow struck and killed the chief. Next, Maodun murdered his stepmother, his younger brother, and all the senior officers who refused to follow his commands. So Maodun made himself the chief [in 209 B.C.E.].

At the start of the year, their leaders hold a small gathering at the chief’s location. By the fifth month, a large meeting takes place at Longcheng, during which they offer sacrifices to their ancestors Heaven and Earth, and the gods and spirits. In the fall, when the horses are fat, they hold another large meeting in the Dai forest. There they count up the number of persons and animals. According to their law, anyone who pulls out his sword one foot from its scabbard receives the death penalty, while those convicted of theft have their property confiscated. They punish minor crimes by whipping and major ones by execution. Nobody is held in confinement for more than ten days, and no more than a handful of men are in jail in the entire nation. At dawn the chief rises to worship the sun as it rises, and at night he does the same to the moon. . . . When a ruler dies, his favorite ministers and concubines must follow him in death,

and they often number in the hundreds or even thousands. . . .

Whenever they start some action, they track the stars and the moon. They launch attacks at the full moon and pull back their army when the moon wanes. Following a battle, they award a jug of wine to those who have cut off the heads of enemies, and they are allowed to keep the plunder that they have seized. They make slaves of any prisoners of war. Therefore, when they make war, each warrior works for his own profit. They are very skilled at using decoy soldiers to trick opponents to their destruction. As soon as they see the enemy, they go after their booty like a flock of birds hungry for prey, but when they are defeated they disperse and evaporate. . . . Anyone who brings back a fallen comrade’s body from the battlefield is given all the dead man’s property. . . .

[In describing the fluctuating relationship between the Chinese and the Xiongnu, Sima Qian quotes a letter written from the Chinese emperor Wen in 162 B.C.E. to the Xiongnu.]

“The emperor respectfully asks about the health of the chief of the Xiongnu. Your ambassadors . . . have brought us two horses. We accept them with respect.

In accordance with what the previous emperor decreed the chief of the Xiongnu was to command the region north of the Great Wall where men shoot arrows from their bows, while we were to rule the region south of the wall, where the people live in houses and wear hats and sashes. Under this arrangement, the multitudes of inhabitants of these areas would get their food and clothing by farming, weaving, or hunting, fathers and sons would live side by side, rulers and officials would both be safe, and no one would act violently or rebel. We have heard, however, that a number of evil and deluded men, whose greed for wealth has overcome them, have forsaken justice and broken our peace treaty, paying no heed to what will happen to the multitudes of inhabitants and destroying the harmony that has been in place between the rulers of our two lands.

This, however, is now past history. You said in your [earlier] letter to me that, since our two nations have been brought together again in peace and our two rulers are again in agreement, you want to rest your army and let your horses graze, so that there may be prosperity and happiness for generation upon generation, and so that we can begin again to exist peacefully and harmoniously. We enthusiastically agree with what you said. The sagely wise man, it is said, renews himself every day, reforming and starting over again so that the elderly can rest and the young can mature, with each one keeping his life secure and living out the span of time that Heaven bestows on him. As long as we and the chief of the Xiongnu join together to walk this path, obeying the will of Heaven and having mercy on the people, granting the benefits of peace to generations without end, then no one in the entire world will fail to benefit. Our two great nations, the Han and the Xiongnu, exist next

to one another. Since the Xiongnu live in the north, where the country is cold and the severe frosts arrive early in the year, we have ordered our imperial officials to send annually to the chief of the Xiongnu a specified amount of grain, yeast, gold, silk cloth, thread, fiber stuffing for clothing, and other items.

The world currently is experiencing a secure peace, and our peoples are undisturbed. We and the chief of the Xiongnu must be like their parents. When we look back at the past, we recognize that the plans of our officials came to nothing as a result of minor things and insignificant causes. Nothing of this sort deserves to overturn the concord existing between brothers.”

Source: Sima Qian, *The Records of the Historian*, chap. 110 in Thomas R. Martin, ed., *Herodotus and Sima Qian: The First Great Historians of Greece and China* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010), 129–33, 136–37.

DOING HISTORY

Perceptions of Outsiders in the Ancient World

1. **Making comparisons:** How might you compare the perceptions of outsiders in these three accounts? Did the authors notice the same features of these societies? Did they focus more on what was exotic or different rather than on what may have been familiar? Did they adopt a similar posture toward the peoples they were describing? Were they simply reporting what they observed or were they making judgments as well?
2. **Describing the “uncivilized”:** Both Tacitus and Sima Qian wrote about peoples living beyond the boundaries of “civilization.” To what extent did they describe these peoples in a similar fashion?
3. **Relating encounters and observations:** How might the actual relationships between the observers and the observed peoples affect the writers’ perceptions of those peoples?